A

SERMON

ON

INFANT BAPTISM,

BY THE

Rev. ARTHUR WIGFALL,

Rector of 'St. Mark's, Clarendon.' S. C.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

EDGEFIELD C. H.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM F. DURISOE.

1842.

CLARENDON, JANUARY 2, 1842.

Rev. and Dear Sir:

I am directed by a Resolution of the Vestry of St. Mark's Church, to request a copy of your Sermon on Infant Baptism, for publication. In meeting the wishes of the Vestry on this occasion, you would not only gratify their individual feelings, but I hope I may be permitted to express the opinion, that you would be performing an acceptable service to our Church.

With great respect,

Dear Sir,

I am, Yours, &c.

DAVID ST. P. DUBOSE, CHAIRMAN,

Of the Vestry of St. Mark's Church.

REV. MR. WIGFALL.

TO THE VESTRY OF ST. MARK'S CHURCH, CLARENDON.

Gentlemen:

Since you desire the publication of my Sermon on Infant Baptism, I see no sufficient reason for withholding it. I am only concerned as to the correctness of the doctrine which it contains. If I am in error, I trust I shall be set right: if correct, I hope others will have candor enough to adopt what they cannot refute.

With great esteem and respect,

I am, Yours sincerely, in Christ,

ARTHUR WIGFALL.

SERMON:

MATHEW IX. 2.—"*And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith, said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.*"

IN considering the text, I propose showing, First: That to the *faithless* there is no promise in the Word of God: and no rational ground for expecting a blessing upon any act whatever, unless done with *faith*.

Secondly: That faith is not only the means of securing God's favor to the possessor of that faith *himself*, but that the faith of *one* may secure a blessing to *a third person*. And then, proceed to make a practical application of the doctrine.

The promises of the Gospel, then, I say, are made to Faith: and there are *no* promises to the faithless. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark xvi. 16.) Here, we see, the promise is made to those who *believe;* and is put solely and expressly upon the ground of faith. To those who believe not is the threat of damnation. Again: "The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with *faith* in them that heard it" (Heb. iv. 2.) "According to your faith be it unto you." (Mat. ix. 29.) "Without *faith* it is impossible to please God." (Heb. ix. 6.) "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Rom. xiv. 23.)

Our Anti-pædo Baptist brethren, taking these passages of Scripture disconnected, with much plausibility, thus argue against Infant Baptism. They quote the language of Scripture. "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved." And, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin." They then proceed to argue that, as a child is ignorant and perfectly unconscious, of the sacrament of which it is the passive recipient, there can obviously, be no *faith* on the part of the subject so baptised; and as "without faith it is impossible to please God," so the baptism of a child, not exercising faith, cannot be pleasing to Him, and consequently must be invalid. They thus exhibit, what they regard, a perfect syllogism, by which, at one stroke, they sweep away the entire basis of infant baptism. But, if we are not greatly mistaken, our brethren, who differ with us on this subject, and for whom we entertain the most cordial brotherly love, have overlooked a most important doctrine, contained in Scripture, and bearing directly on this subject.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God." This language is general, and is used by the Apostle in the most comprehensive sense. *Baptism*, therefore, can form no exception, and must come, necessarily, within the rule. "Without *faith*," in baptism, therefore, "it is impossible to please God." Thus argue our opponents, and so far, we admit the argument in its full force. We would be the last to detract from it one iota of its weight. Indeed we do not understand how any one, professing to be a Christian, can, with the language of Scripture staring him in the face, venture to question this doctrine. To say that *faith* is not necessary to the validity of a sacrament, or that it will be blessed "without faith," is striking at the very foundation of the Gospel, and openly "denying the faith."

What then? Are we not abandoning the doctrine of infant baptism, and yielding the entire argument? Far from it. We are changing, perhaps, our ground, but only to occupy a post from which we shall be the better able to repel, successfully, all assaults, from whatever quarter they may come.

We hold then that baptism "without faith," is something worse than an idle mockery. Such is the plain language of Scripture. "Whatsoever is not of faith is *sin*." But the child being unconscious of the very intention of the sacrament, we know that there can, possibly, be no *faith* exercised on *its* part. How then is this defect to be remedied? This, I admit, is a pertinent and important question, and I shall not attempt to blink it. I trust I shall be able to meet it *successfully*; at all events I shall do it *candidly*.

The *child*, it will be observed, is not the *only* acting party in this sacrament. The Church, in its wisdom, has ordered that there shall be sponsors, whose duty it is to bring the child to the font; and who take upon *themselves* the vows and obligations intended for the infant. These sponsors have, *in the contemplation of the Church*, a perfect understanding of this sacrament, and such *faith in Christ as is required in adult baptism*.

This brings us to the main point in this discourse. Is there such a doctrine as *imputed faith* taught in the Scriptures? Can the faith of one be "imputed for righteousness" to a third person? Can the faith of the *sponsor* give efficacy to the sacrament, in securing a blessing to the child? Such a doctrine is, I conceive, clearly set forth in Scripture, as I shall now endeavour to prove; and to this purpose I propose using the words of the text. "And behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith, said to the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good

cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." Here we have a man whose *sins* are forgiven—who receives the pardon of God—who is "born of the spirit," and become a regenerated soul. This is no *temporal* but *spiritual* blessing conferred by Jesus. This sense is manifest from the context. The Jews, *standing by on the occasion*, understood Jesus as exercising that power which belongs to God alone, of granting absolute forgiveness and remission of sin. Hence they charge Christ with "blasphemy," and demand of him: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke v. 21.) To this, Christ, so far from *denying* the assumption of Divine power in forgiving the sins of the sick, admits and justifies the charge. "That ye may know (says Christ to the Jews) that the Son of Man *hath power upon the earth to forgive sins*, (he said to the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee arise, &c." (Luke v. 24.) If Christ had not *really* meant by those words, "thy sins be forgiven thee," *what the Jews understood*, namely, that he was assuming the power of God to forgive sins absolutely, it would be absurd and irreverent to suppose that he would have wrought a miracle upon the occasion, expressly for the purpose of *confirming them in their error* and *tempting them to sin*. Thus, I apprehend, there can be no doubt that the blessing conferred upon the sick of the palsy was not *temporal*, but *spiritual* and *eternal*

It now remains to ascertain *how* this spiritual blessing was obtained. First, then was it bestowed upon the sick of the palsy, *without faith?* On the contrary, we are expressly informed, that *faith* was the sole moving cause of the forgiveness of his ins. But *whose* faith? The faith of him who was sick of the palsy? The faith of him who received the blessing? Not so. "And Jesus seeing *their* faith," i. e. says Whitby, "the faith of *those* who let down the sick of the palsy." (see Whitby in loco.) This interpretation is obvious from the plain narrative as it stands in the Gospels. The account is, that "they" (his friends) "brought to Jesus a man sick of the palsy, and he seeing *their* faith," i. e. the faith of the friends who brought him "said unto the sick of the palsy. Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." Here, then, we have a plain, simple, unequivocal account of *one* sinner, at least, whose sins were forgiven him, who was regenerated, by virtue of faith, *not in himself*, but *in his friends*. Here is an undeniable account of the faith of *one* being imputed for righteousness to *another*. Here, we conceive, the doctrine of *imputed faith* is clearly taught in the Word of God.

Such as are disposed to quibble about words, may suggest the possibility that "their," in the text, may, according to the rules of Syntax, include, also, "the sick of the

palsy." I conceive such a construction to be forced and unnatural, and contrary to all rules of true criticism; and in this opinion I am sustained by the highest human authority, Dr. Whitby. (see the above quotation,) who is regarded, by *all* denominations. as the most learned commentator upon the sacred text. But, to remove the possibility of any objection of this kind, I will produce other instances of imputed faith, where the anticipated objection cannot possibly lie.

First. then, the Syrophœnician woman (Mat xv. 22.) is an instance in point. She came to Jesus crying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a Devil." ***** **** ***** "Then Jesus answered, and said unto her, O woman, great is *thy faith:* be it unto thee even as thou wilt And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."

Again: "Jairus came to Jesus, and besought him greatly, saying my little daughter lieth at the point of death." And when they brought word to the Ruler that his daughter was dead, Jesus said to him "be not afraid *only believe.*" And Jesus took the damsel by the hand and said "Talitha cumi" —"Damsel arise." "And straightway the damsel arose and walked." (Mark v 41.)

Again: A certain Centurion, we are told, had a servant who was sick and ready to die. He sent to Jesus "beseeching him to come and heal his servant." Jesus exclaims, "I have not seen so great *faith*, no not in Isreal" "And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole, who had been sick." (John iv. 50.)

In the cases of the Shunammite woman (2. Kings, ch. iv.) and the nobleman of Capernaum, (John iv. 46.) the Son of the one was restored to health, the other to life, in consequence of the *parent's faith.*

Other instances, of the same character, are not wanting in Scripture: but those already quoted are amply sufficient to establish the doctrine contended for. We perceive that *faith*, and *faith only*, was the means whereby the blessing of God was secured in these several cases; but it will be observed that *that* faith was not the faith of *the individuals receiving the blessings*, but the *faith of third persons.* How was it with the daughter of the Syrophœnician woman—the son of the nobleman of Capernaum—the Centurion's servant? By *faith* they were restored to health. But *whose* faith? The faith of the sick and the dead? Not so. It was the faith of the mother, the father and the master. "O woman great is *thy* faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt: and the *daughter* was *made whole* from that hour." Here is the *faith* of the *mother*, not the daughter: but the *daughter receives the*

blessing. The Centurion's servant is healed by *faith*. "I have not seen so great faith, says Jesus, no not in Israel." But *whose* faith? The faith of the *Centurion*, not the *servant*. But the *servant* receives the blessing. The nobleman's son is healed by *faith* not *his own* but his *Father's*. And last and strongest of all are the Shunammite's son, and the daughter of Jairus. Here the children are *dead:* and, consequently, the bare possibility of *their* exercising faith is utterly removed.

These cases establish, beyond question, the doctrine, that God will, in consideration of the faith of a *third person*, bestow blessings upon one *incapable of exercising faith himself*.

One objection will here be raised, which it is necessary to answer. It will be urged that the cases above quoted, were but *temporal* blessings—health and life The objection, though specious at first sight, has, in truth, no force in it. If, in consideration of *my faith*, God will bestow *temporal* blessings upon *another*, as is admitted, why may we not believe that, in consideration of my faith, he will also grant *spiritual* blessings to that other? Is there any *inherent* difficulty or absurdity involved in the proposition itself? Is there any attribute of the Divine mind, any thing in the nature of sin which forbids the supposition? Is it true that God is more *averse* to bestowing *spiritual* than *temporal* blessings? Or is it more *difficult* for him to perform the one than the other? God declares that, he "has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." So God cannot be *averse* to bestowing *spiritual* blessings. That there can be no greater *difficulty* in the one case than the other we have the same authority for believing. This objection was long since answered by Jesus to the Pharisees of *old*. "For whether is easier, says he, to say thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say arise and walk." Here Christ teaches that all things are alike easy with Him: for whether it was to heal the sick, or to forgive the sinner, he had but to speak the word, and it was done.

But all moral reasoning apart (which of necessity must be inconclusive on a subject of this character) I have shown, in the case of "the sick of the palsy," that the blessing obtained, by the *faith of his friends*, was *spiritual* and *eternal*.

What has been said is sufficient, I conceive, to satisfy the unprejudiced: but our authority is not yet exhausted, and I deem it improper to leave any thing of weight unnoticed on a subject of such importance as this. We find in Scripture (James v. 15.) such language as this, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the Church: and let *them* pray

over him ********** ; and the *prayer of faith* shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed SINS they shall be *forgiven him.*" Now in the passage just quoted, our opponents are utterly barred from the quibble that "sins" don't mean "sins," but only "the temporal *consequences* of sin, and, therefore, it is only a temporal blessing promised." Here, we see, the *forgiveness of sins* is promised to "the prayer of faith" in addition to the *temporal* blessing. First, in consideration of "the prayer of faith," the Lord promises to raise up "the sick," whether he be a sinner or a righteous man: "and, continues the Apostle, IF he have committed SINS they *(also)* shall be forgiven him:" i. e under *any* circumstances the sick "shall be raised up," and in addition to this, *if* he be a sinner, his sins shall be forgiven him. This much, I take it, is established: i. e. that the *forgiveness of sins*, in the common and proper sense, is here promised to "*the prayer of faith.*"

It only remains then to consider *who are included* in the words, "and the prayer of faith shall save the sick?" Can they, according to any sensible interpretation, be made to include the *sick himself?* What are the words? "Let him (the sick) call for the elders of the Church: and let *them* pray *over* him ****: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick." Let us analyze the sentence. First: the sick shall send for the elders—then, let *them* pray, i. e. "the elders;" next, they shall pray, not *with*, but "*over*" the sick. Now if "the sick" was to be saved by his *own* faith, why call "the elders" at all? Again, it is undeniable that "them" in the sentence refers *exclusively* to *the elders;* and, lastly, it would be palpably absurd to talk of a man's praying '*over*' himself. It seems, then, *tolerably* plain that the sick is to have "his sins forgiven him," not by reason of any faith *in himself*, but in consequence of the faith of "the elders." But let us hear the same Apostle again (James v. 19—20.) "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him: let him know, that he who converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death." Will it be argued that the words "he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way" mean, a sinner who *converteth himself?* or will it be contended that, "saving a soul from death" means *temporal blessings?* Either supposition would be too palpable an absurdity to merit notice. The Apostle, then, in the text, plainly puts forth the doctrine that *one*, by means of *his faith*, may *convert another*, and thus "*save a soul from death.*" If these words can be made to bear any other meaning than that we have given them, then we shall be forced to the conclusion that it is impossible for language to have any fixed and certain meaning at all.

Thus, I apprehend, is made out, to the satisfaction of every unprejudiced mind, the doctrine of imputed faith; namely, that Christ, in consideration of the *faith of a third person*, will bestow *spiritual* blessings upon one who is *incapable* of exercising faith himself.

We come now to apply this doctrine to the subject of infant baptism We see that God has promised that "the prayer of faith." and *that not his own*, shall secure to the sinner, the forgiveness of his *sins*. We see that, in time past, *the faith* of the parent, the master and the friend. has secured the blessing of Christ, to the child, the servant and the friend. Who then will presume to say that Christ will not in *our* day also, bless the child, *in consideration of the faith of the parent or the friend*, who stands as sponsor at the font? "Seeing *their* faith," why may not Jesus as well say to the new born babe as to the hoary leper, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee?" Will it be said that infants have no sins to be forgiven? That, I apprehend, would be denying flatly the doctrine of "original sin." True. they have no sins of *commission;* but they have "the carnal mind which is enmity against God." And except "*they* be born again *they* cannot see the kingdom of God." But, if God has promised that "the prayer of faith" in *one*, will move him to forgive the sins of *another;* surely we can expect this blessing, with so much confidence, for none as the new born babe. "Then said Peter unto them, repent and be *baptised* every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the *remission of sins;* and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you and TO YOUR CHILDREN."

I deem it a waste of words to say more to establish the position that, if we bring our children, in baptism, to Jesus with a *living faith*, we have a right to expect his blessing upon them. I mean not "a change of state," but a change of *heart*. If, in FAITH, we lay them at his feet, we may feel assured that he will say to *them* also, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee."

But we now come to a no less important inquiry. If we bring our child to the font *without faith, what right have we to expect a blessing* upon the sacrament? Is there a promise in the entire word of God to the faithless? Is there a syllable in the Scriptures, that warrants us in supposing that the sacraments of the Church are availing to those who partake of them *without faith?* On the contrary are we not told that "the word preached did not profit them not being mixed with *faith* in them that heard it."—That "whatsoever is not of *faith* is sin." And, "without *faith* it is impossible to please God." Now if we come to the sacrament "*with-*

out faith," God is not pleased; how then can we expect his blessing? And it will be well if we bring to the font something more than a *general faith* in *Christ;* let it be a *specific* faith in the *efficacy of this sacrament.* "And all things *whatsoever* ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive." "*According* to your FAITH be it unto you." If you bring your child to the font, then, *without faith*, you will take him away *without a blessing;* for such is the measure—so shall it be unto you. You bring your child to the font, *praying* God that he, "*may receive remission of sin, by spiritual regeneration;*" (*) and you *don't believe* that the child *can* receive "*spiritual* regeneration" in baptism. "Whatsoever, then, ye shall ask in prayer *not* believing, ye shall *not* receive." If then you bring your child to the font *not believing* that he *may* receive "SPIRITUAL regeneration"—if you bring him without faith in the sacrament—you do it without a promise: and therefore if you hope for a blessing, your hope is presumptious. When, therefore, you bring, or send, your child, with UNBELIEVING sponsors, to the baptismal font, you are trifling with the sacrament of the Church—you are trifling with the salvation of your child—you are trifling with God. The whole scene is a solemn mockery—an actual profanation. If the sacrament is availing, it must be through the *faith* of those who present the child to Christ. There can, possibly, be no faith in the child: there can be no blessing without faith ("whatsoever is not of faith is sin:") and, if there be no faith in those who bring the child to Jesus, the water, without hope, must fall unblest upon the unconscious recipient—for the sacrament is received in UNBELIEF. I would as soon a Priest of Moloch should mumble, over my child, his cabalistick rites, as to bring him, with INFIDEL SPONSORS, to be baptised in the *name of* CHRIST. There is something in the mere idea of such a profanation of that holy sacrament, which is revolting and abhorrent to my sense of the sacred religion which I profess. I dare not, knowingly, perpetrate such profanation in the temple of the living God. I should deem my hands polluted and my soul defiled if I should call upon God to bless the offering of a Cain—one without faith in Christ—without God in the world. Hence the profound wisdom and piety of those holy men—the founders of our Church, who at the stake sealed their faith in blood—in requiring that *sponsors* should be COMMUNICANTS. (xxix canon of the Church.) That they should *at least* make a PROFESSION of the religion of Christ:—at least give the *outward* evidence of FAITH IN JESUS. The *only* evidence by which *man* can judge. To this it may be replied, that there is no *assurance* that one has FAITH IN CHRIST, because

*Baptismal service.

he is a COMMUNICANT. With shame and sorrow I acknowledge the truth of the objection. But if we cannot confide in those who make the PROFESSION—who assure us, by the most solemn vows, that they have the required faith in Jesus, how are we to trust those who have not so much as "named the name of Christ:" who do not even *pretend* to the required faith. But in all reasoning we are bound, by every rule of charity or logic, to presume that a man is, what he *professes to be*, until we have evidence to the contrary. The law *presumes* every man innocent—his guilt must be *proved*. We should not *assume* then that the communicant is a hypocrite: let condemnation always *follow*, and not *precede* the evidence. But gratuitously to *assume* that a man is a christian, when he does not so much as *profess* to be one, is the most extraordinary mode of reasoning that ever entered into the *head* of a logician or the *heart* of a Christian.

Holding these views, my beloved brethren, how solicitous should I be that those who "bring little children to Jesus," should *themselves* believe in that blessed name. Am I not under the most solemn obligation to exercise all discretion—use every *human* precaution, in securing sponsors who have that faith in Christ, which can, in my opinion, alone give VALIDITY to the sacrament of Baptism? But, my beloved brethren, am I the *only* one who should be interested in this matter? Have I succeeded in raising a *doubt* even in your minds on this vital question? If you harbour the faintest shadow of a doubt, and are seriously concerned about the salvation of your child, you cannot hesitate as to your course. The word of God proclaims it—the Church commands it—your reason must approve it. When, therefore, you look round for one to bring your little children, in baptism, to Jesus, do not, I beseech you, prostitute that holy sacrament and peril their souls, merely to please earthly friends, or to promote the worldly interest of your child—choose Godfathers who are rich in FAITH rather than in GOLD. Seek for sponsors, such as those who brought the "sick of the palsy" to Jesus, that he, seeing THEIR FAITH, may say to your child also, "Son be of good cheer: thy sins be forgiven thee."